

like, but we sure do know what a repeal would do; it would gut health insurance premium tax credits that help millions of Americans obtain health insurance they could not otherwise afford. It would unwind an expansion of the Medicaid Program that covers millions more Americans in some 30 States that have chosen to participate, casting tens of millions of Americans—men, women, and children—out of their health insurance.

At the same time, it would deliver an enormous tax boon to millionaires and billionaires, as usual for Republicans, by repealing the revenue we used to pay for ObamaCare. This tax boon is a 16-percent reduction in the taxes owed by millionaires and billionaires on their investment income.

Republicans want to take health insurance away from tens of millions of ordinary Americans and simultaneously reward those at the very top of the income pile with a big tax benefit. So much for all the talk we have heard from Republicans about the deficit.

At least in Rhode Island, the Affordable Care Act is working. The law launched accountable care organizations that are improving care while lowering costs. In Rhode Island, Coastal Medical and Integra Community Care Network—two primary care-focused ACOs—are not only driving down per person health expenditures but achieving high marks on quality and on patient experience. In total, Coastal has saved \$24 million over 3 years and Integra has saved \$4 million in its first year as an ACO.

The Affordable Care Act also has protected seniors from the dreaded drug price doughnut hole, and I can tell you I heard a lot about the doughnut hole from seniors in Rhode Island when I was running for the Senate. The Affordable Care Act has protected families where someone had a chronic condition and couldn't get insurance, and the Affordable Care Act has prevented insurers from throwing customers off coverage when they get sick.

It is true that some of the health insurance exchanges haven't attracted enough competition. We can fix that. Indeed, to help with that issue, Senators BROWN, FRANKEN, and I are today introducing the Consumer Health Options and Insurance Competition Enhancement Act, or the CHOICE Act, to add a public health insurance option to the health insurance exchanges. This public option would guarantee that consumers always have an affordable, high-quality option when shopping for health insurance and a strong health care fallback when markets fail.

ObamaCare may not be perfect, but it has done an awful lot of good. Millions of Americans who lacked insurance now have it, and the rate of uninsured Americans has fallen to 8.6 percent, about half of what it was in 2010. Projected Federal health care costs are down nearly \$3 trillion.

Instead of demolishing a system that works well for millions of Americans

with no replacement on the horizon, let's use our proposal to make it better. Let's add a public option to our health insurance exchanges.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, if I could address another topic now and ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF SCOTT PRUITT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, the question I bring to the floor today is what is Scott Pruitt hiding? Last week, the Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing on President Trump's nominee to the Environmental Protection Agency. Today, for my 155th "Time to Wake Up" speech, I have unanswered questions about Mr. Pruitt's fitness for that role. His evasiveness at his hearing signaled nothing good about his ties to the industry he would regulate if confirmed, and the lack of curiosity about these industry ties from my Republican colleagues speaks volumes about the political clout of that industry.

One question stood out. Our new chairman, Senator BARRASSO, posed the standard question of nominees to Mr. Pruitt in our hearing: "Do you know of any matters, which you may or may not have disclosed, that might place you in any conflict of interest if you are confirmed?"

Mr. Pruitt answered: "No."

Scott Pruitt crawls with conflict of interest. He has conflicts of interest with the fossil fuel industry from his political fundraising. We just don't know how bad. He likely has conflicts of interest from confidential private meetings with fossil fuel companies at Republican Attorneys General Association get-togethers, but we just don't know how bad. There is almost certainly evidence of conflict of interest in his undisclosed emails with fossil fuel companies, but again we don't know how bad. He came clean on none of this in his confirmation hearing.

This chart is a simple, and a likely incomplete, representation of the many financial links reported between Pruitt and the fossil fuel industry. At the top are the companies and the entities that have supported Mr. Pruitt with political funding. Down below are the political organizations for which he has raised money.

Pruitt for Attorney General was his reelection campaign. The polluters gave to Pruitt for Attorney General. Oklahoma's Strong PAC was his leadership PAC, a separate political fundraising vehicle. The polluters gave to Oklahoma Strong.

There was another one here called Liberty 2.0, Mr. Pruitt's super PAC, but he closed it down so we don't list it. While it existed, his super PAC took nearly \$200,000 in fossil fuel industry contributions. Mr. Pruitt served as the chair of the Republican Attorneys General Association in 2012 and 2013 and

was a member of RAGA's executive committee through 2015. Between 2014 and 2016, RAGA received \$530,000 from Koch Industries. It received \$350,000 from Murray Energy. It received \$160,000 from ExxonMobil, and it received \$125,000 from Devon Energy.

Devon Energy, by the way, is the company whose letter Mr. Pruitt transposed virtually verbatim onto his official letterhead to send to the EPA as the official position of the Oklahoma attorney general.

During his hearing, Mr. Pruitt refused to provide details about any solicitations he made from regulated industries for the Republican Attorneys General Association. We know they got special attention from RAGA. Here is a confidential 2015 meeting agenda from RAGA when Pruitt was on its executive committee. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the meeting agenda page.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

RAGA SUMMER NATIONAL MEETING 2015, THE GREENBRIER, WEST VIRGINIA

MEETING AGENDA

The Greenbrier; 300 West Main Street, White Sulphur Springs, WV; (855) 616-2441.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2015

A Cyber Lounge and Hospitality Suite are provided all day for your convenience by Rent-A-Center in the Chesapeake Bay Room, 5:40 PM—Lead Shuttles for West Virginia Host Committee Dinner. Location: Front Main Entrance of the Hotel.

6:00 PM–8:00 PM—West Virginia Host Committee Reception & Dinner; Location: Kate's Mountain Lodge; Special Guest: Homer Hickam—American author; Vietnam veteran, and a former NASA engineer. His autobiographical novel *Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, was a No. 1 New York Times Best Seller, and was the basis for the 1999 film *October Sky*.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2015

A Cyber Lounge and Hospitality Suite are provided all day for your convenience by Rent-A-Center in the Chesapeake Bay Room 7:00 AM–10:30 AM—Breakfast (on your own); Location: Main Dining Room; *Breakfast is included, please provide your room key to the waiter. Please note: denim and exercise attire are not permitted.

11:00 AM–12:30 PM—AG Business Meeting; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

12:30 PM–2:00 PM—RAGA ERC & Capital Club Lunch: What Difference Does It Make? Measuring the Success of Republican AGs; Location: Chesapeake Room; Speaker: Attorney General Pam Bondi, Florida.

2:00 PM–5:30 PM—Private Meetings with Attorneys General and Staff; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

2:00 PM–2:40 PM—Private meeting with Murray Energy; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

2:50 PM–3:10 PM—Private meeting with Microsoft; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

3:15 PM–3:35 PM—Private meeting with Southern Company; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

3:40 PM–4:00 PM—Private meeting with American Fuel Petrochemical Manufacturers; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. This confidential agenda mentions a private meeting

with Murray Energy. It mentions a private meeting with Southern Company, and it mentions a private meeting with American Fuel Petrochemical Manufacturers, which represents a lot of these characters. Murray Energy, of course, is right there. Southern Company is right there, and the American Fuel Petrochemical Manufacturers organization, I am sure, represents the others.

This confidential meeting agenda is all we have about what took place in those private meetings. I asked Mr. Pruitt in our hearings about the content of these private meetings, and he wouldn't answer any questions. He doesn't want us to know what was discussed there with the big fossil fuel polluters—companies whose pollution he will oversee as EPA Administrator.

Pruitt was also a chairman of the Rule of Law Defense Fund. The so-called Rule of Law Defense Fund is a dark money political operation that launders the identity of donors giving money to the Republican Attorneys General Association. As the New York Times said, the fund is a "legal entity that allows companies benefiting from the actions of Mr. Pruitt and other Republican attorneys general to make anonymous donations, in unlimited amounts." It is a complete black hole of political cash.

In the hearing, Pruitt refused to shine any light into the dark money he solicited or received from these fossil fuel polluters or others for the Rule of Law Defense Fund—not whom he asked for money, not who gave money, not what they gave, nothing. This is an organization that appears to have a million-dollar-a-year budget so someone was busy raising a lot of money. How much exactly, from whom, and what was the deal? Scott Pruitt doesn't want our committee or this Senate or the American people to know.

Colleagues and I sent letters to the Office of Government Ethics and to the Environmental Protection Agency's top ethics official. Their responses indicate that their ethics rules predate Citizens United and its torrent of dark political money. Their regulatory authority on government ethics has not caught up with the post-Citizens United dark money world. Since their ethics authorities have not been updated for these dark money conflicts, if Pruitt doesn't disclose any of this information before the Senate, no one will know, and even those government ethics watchdogs may end up blind to conflicts of interest.

That doesn't mean there isn't a conflict of interest here. What it means is it is a hidden conflict of interest. That makes it our duty in the Senate to examine those relationships, except for the fact that the fossil fuel industry now, more or less, runs the Republican Party, so there is a scrupulous lack of interest in this fossil fuel industry dark money.

How badly does Mr. Pruitt want to hide his dealings with his fossil fuel pa-

trons? An Open Records Act request was filed with the Oklahoma attorney general's office—Mr. Pruitt's office—for emails with energy firms, fossil fuel trade groups, and their political arms, with companies like Devon Energy, Murray Energy, and Koch Industries, and the American Petroleum Institute, which is the industry's trade association.

Let me share three facts about this Open Records Act inquiry: No. 1, the Open Records Act request was filed more than 745 days ago—over 2 years, 2 years. No. 2, Pruitt's office has admitted that there are at least 3,000 responsive documents to that Open Records Act request. Consider that fact alone for a moment. There were 3,000 emails and other documents between his office and these fossil fuel companies and front groups—3,000. No. 3, zero, exactly zero of those documents have been produced—745 days, 3,000 documents, zero produced.

Think how smelly those 3,000 emails must be when he would rather have this flagrant Open Records Act compliance failure than have any of those 3,000 emails see the light of day. Given the important financial interests of these groups before the EPA, do we really not think that 3,000 emails back and forth between him and his office and those groups might be relevant to his conflicts of interest as Administrator? Until very recently, Republicans had a keen interest in emails. Chairman BARRASSO asked that important question: "Do you know of any matters which you may or may not have disclosed that might place you in any conflict of interest if you are confirmed?" Scott Pruitt answered: "No."

On this record, there is every reason to believe that his statement is false. Might having raised significant dark money from the industry that he would regulate create a conflict of interest? Let's say that he made a call to Devon Energy and said: I slapped your letter on my letterhead and turned it in as if it were the official work of the Oklahoma attorney general's office. Now I need a million bucks. And you can give it to the Rule of Law Defense Fund as dark money, without anyone knowing that it was you.

Might such a quid pro quo create a conflict of interest in his ability to carry out the duties of EPA Administrator in matters affecting Devon Energy? It is impossible to say that it would not be a conflict of interest.

Let's say that at those confidential private meetings with Murray Energy and Southern Company, something went on. Might something that takes place in private meetings with Big Energy interests that he is going to have to regulate create a possible conflict of interest? They paid to be there. They wanted something. Might that not give rise to a conflict of interest?

And who knows what conflicts of interest would be divulged if his office were not sitting on 3,000 undisclosed emails with fossil fuel industries that

he will be regulating as EPA Administrator?

I challenge anyone to come to this Senate floor and tell me with a straight face that there is nothing that those emails could reveal that might create a conflict of interest for the man discharged with regulating the companies on the other end of those emails. "No" just doesn't cut it as an answer from Mr. Pruitt when there is still so much that he is hiding.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF BETSY DEVOS

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise today to speak on the nomination of Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education.

Public education is deeply personal for me. I am proud to have attended Michigan public schools, and I have three children who did so as well. I know firsthand the importance of a strong public education system. My father Herb was a proud teacher and taught English for 32 years in Rochester, MI, where I grew up.

My father was part of the "greatest generation." He fought for our country in World War II and returned home to help build America's middle class. Our Nation owes these men and women a debt of gratitude for building a country where anyone who is willing to work hard and play by the rules can find opportunity.

But too many families today feel that the American dream remains just out of reach. It seems that they can hardly get by, much less get ahead. At a time of growing income inequality, public schools can and do provide a ladder of opportunity in communities across the Nation—urban, rural, and suburban alike. Strong public schools are vital to our economy, our democracy, and to our Nation's global competitiveness.

I think we can all agree that a child's chance to succeed should not be dictated by his or her ZIP Code. While many crucial education decisions are made at the State and at the local levels, the Federal Government also has a role to play in providing the necessary educational tools and proper protections for all of our children to flourish.

We need a Secretary of Education who is dedicated to improving access to quality public education based on sound evidence and ensuring the proper implementation of Federal laws designed to protect and to help all of our children. That is why I am deeply troubled by President Trump's nomination